

CERTAIN CURIOUS CALCULATIONS ABOUT LOAVES AND FISHES NO. 1822

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1885,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
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“When I broke the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took you up? They said unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took you up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that you do not understand?”
Mark 8:19-21.

THE disciples had come on board the vessel, and had forgotten to bring bread with them—good men's memories sometimes fail them. For that reason they were greatly disturbed in mind, and they supposed that Jesus was disquieted also, and that He had shaped His speech so as to give them an indirect rebuke when He mentioned the leaven of the Pharisees. How little they understood His mind, though they had been so long a time with Him! His thoughts were not occupied about bread for Himself, neither was there any distressing care in His heart about bread for them. His mind was at perfect rest about all secular things, and even as to all spiritual things He was by no means tossed about.

Notwithstanding all His trials and His sorrows, I suppose that there never was a serener mind than that of Jesus Christ our Lord. His heart was great as an ocean, and though visited with terrible tempests, yet it was the Pacific Ocean still. *They* might be troubled about bread, but He was resting about that and all things else. The winds which tossed the little lakes of their little minds into boiling cauldrons did not suffice to create a ripple upon the surface of His mighty soul.

Is it not well for us at this hour that it is so? We are fluttered and dismayed, but the mind of our great Lord is fearless and undisturbed. “He will not fail nor be discouraged.” The child cries because the ship rolls, but his father at the helm smiles at the storm, and what a mercy it is for the child that father can smile, for if the captain were weak where would the vessel be? If the father's heart failed him, where would his boy look for comfort? Calm face of Jesus, we look up to You, and we are quieted!

The Master wishing to comfort His servants bade them consider what they already knew, and review what they had already seen. Usually the eyes of the Christian should be directed forward—it is foolish to try to live on past experience, it is a very dangerous, if not a fatal habit, to judge ourselves to be safe because of something that we felt or did twenty years ago. Yet, for all that, we may look back to gain practical lessons for times of service and comfortable lessons for hours of trial. Like the archer, we may draw the string back that it may shoot the arrow onward with greater force.

The Master asks His followers whether they had used their eyes. “Having eyes, see you not?” They had seen two wonderful miracles, by which thousands of persons had been fed, had they really seen them? Had they been satisfied just to look at the bread and the fish, and at the feasting multitude, and then to let the whole scene melt away from them? Had they really heard the voice of what the Lord had done? “Having ears, hear you not?” Had they missed the message, altogether?

Then He adds, “Perceive you not yet, neither understand?” Do you not know what My action meant when I multiplied the loaves? Do you not see how it reveals My all-sufficiency? Have you not spelled between the lines this word—that God feeds all things—that He opens His hand, and supplies the want

of every living thing? Have you not yet discovered by those two miracles that there is nothing impossible with your Lord?

May we not also have missed our Lord's meanings full often? May we not have walked through a palace of wonders without observing the gleams of glory, the flashes of light eternal? Our unbelief is the undeniable evidence that we have not learned all that we ought to have done, for the outcome of spiritually seeing, perceiving, and understanding is faith. He that believes little has learned little, he that doubts and is troubled, is but a babe, needing still to learn the rudiments of holy scholarship.

The Lord further asks them that tender question, "And do you not remember?" Brethren, we remember much that we ought to forget, and we forget much that we ought to remember. Down the stream of memory floats trash from the city of Sodom, and we diligently gather it, but down the same stream descends costly timber from Lebanon, and we suffer it to drift by us. Our sieve holds the chaff and rejects the corn. It ought not so to be.

Let us look back upon the whole of our past lives at this hour with a careful, leisurely glance, and see whether there is not enough in our diaries to condemn our doubts and bury our cares, or at least to shut up our anxieties in a cage made of the golden bars of past mercy, and fastened in with jeweled bolts of gratitude. "The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us." Let us glory in what the Lord is going to do, and magnify His name for His mercy which is yet to be revealed. Let each one of us, sing with David, "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, I will praise you, O God, my God." Then has memory performed her part aright when from the altars of the past she has snatched a living coal with which to set on fire the incense of today.

Not being able to read your own personal diaries, for these are only known to yourselves, I shall endeavor to take you back to the records of the disciples' memories, and we will think of the text as it brings before us the two great miracles of feeding the hungry. May we learn therefrom what the Spirit designs to teach us by them.

I. And the first thing I shall want to bring to your recollection is THE DARING PROJECT, YET UNAVOIDABLE.

This was the daring project—to feed five thousand persons in the wilderness. Two hundred pennyworths was the calculation of one of the ready-reckoners of the hour. Some men are always very ready at counting the pennies which they have not got. Whenever there is a holy deed to be done, our mathematical-minded unbelievers are prompt with their estimates of cost, and their prudent forecasts of grave deficiencies. We are great at calculations when we are little at believing.

How can the needful amount be raised? It is so much a head among so many members. Unfortunately the heads do not yield the poll tax, and the money does not come, and confidence in man leaves us weeping by the broken cistern. This is the way in which a large part of the church's thought boils up, evaporates, and is wasted. Alas, for those calculations about pennyworths!

Or else it is, "From whence can we satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" "From whence," as if there could be any "whence" but one! Where does everything come from by which man lives? Comes it not from God? It goes round about in different channels, but it knows only one source. When any of the channels fail, the fountain is still flowing, and he that has faith to go to it directly shall not want.

But it did seem to the disciples a very preposterous idea that with nothing but sand, and stone, and rock round about them, they should make a banquet for five thousand men. Is it not much more preposterous that the Christian church should have to evangelize such a city as London? It may not seem so to you, but if you lived in the midst of the extreme poverty of the East End, you would think it the problem of problems, how to reach the sunken multitudes. We little dream on what a volcano we live. The pent-up misery and the seething sin of London may yet produce a second edition of the French Revolution unless the grace of God shall interpose. The people are famishing bodily, mentally, morally, spiritually, and we must feed them. I marvel not if in the presence of these dying millions you cry—"From whence?"

But then London is only one out of many cities. Our whole nation is a small fraction of the myriads of our race. China, India, Africa are yet to be fed. The command is, "Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The proposal is that the knowledge of the Lord shall yet cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and I repeat the keynote which I sounded just now—it is a daring project, startling to the thoughtful, impossible to the calculating, hard even to the believing.

But then, you see, in the case of the disciples in the wilderness it was an inevitable project. However strange the proposition might seem, it pressed upon them—they could not avoid it, for the people had no food with them and were fainting. Many of them had come from far. If they attempted to seek their own homes without refreshment they would die by the way, and therefore it would not do to send the multitude away. They must be fed. "How is it to be done?" is the question and whether they can answer it or not, the necessity is there all the same.

With the Savior it was an unavoidable necessity. *It would break His heart to see them fainting and famishing.* He could not endure it. At the very thought of their destitute condition He was moved with compassion. His whole nature was stirred, convulsed, and filled with excitement at the sight of hunger, pallor, weariness, and faintness. The great Shepherd *must* feed these hungry sheep. It is not with Him, "Can it be done?" or "Can it not be done?" but it *must* be done.

One of the imperial necessities which sometimes took possession of the royal heart of Christ had entered into His soul, and "He must needs" do its bidding. Himself took their infirmities and carried their sorrows. He was such an all-comprehending man that He included them within His own manhood. If they hungered, He hungered; if they fainted, He fainted; and if they died, He Himself seemed to die, and therefore, by the intense sympathy of His nature He was driven to feel that the multitude must be fed.

Just imagine that they had not been fed—that they had begun to faint and die of hunger all over those hills to which they had followed Jesus, *how it would have marred His ministry!* Why, surely, the disciples who had said somewhat cavalierly, "Send the multitude away," would have been oppressed with a lifelong sorrow if their wish had been carried out. They never would have forgotten that dreadful dreary day, and the starvation, and the fainting, and the death which followed it. Think of what mischief it would have done to Christ's cause. The rumor that He led the people into solitary places, and that there they died of hunger, would have been greatly derogatory to our Lord, for what prophet ever did this?

What capital the Pharisees would have made of it! How exultingly they would have cried, "Is this man after all a prophet like to Moses, who fed the people with manna in the wilderness?" They would have cried, "He said that He was the Son of God, He claimed to have raised the dead, but if He had really possessed this power He would have fed the hungry multitude that had spent their strength in following Him." No, the Christ cannot have it so. He has come to save men's lives, He cannot let them die. He must feed the crowd.

Now, imagine, men and brethren, that we never carry out the commission which Christ has laid upon us today, that of teaching the multitude—imagine that henceforth we never labor to win souls—that we give up London as a forlorn case—that we abandon the heathen world as assuredly given over to destruction, like a vessel driven by a hurricane upon an ironbound coast—imagine it, I say. Can you endure the imagination? I cannot abandon the drifting barque. Let us man the lifeboat!

I know that some quiet themselves into a kind of despair as to the possibility of the Lord JEHOVAH ever being King over this whole earth—will you try the wretched experiment? So these people must be left to die, for how can so many be fed? But the project of love shall be executed, to that hope we cling, and to that end would we spend and be spent. If things look not so, and Christianity occupies as yet but a mere corner of the world, it matters not to our faith, we believe still. Faith counts no odds. One man with God on his side is in the majority if never another thinks as he does. Therefore, in feebleness of numbers we are yet omnipotent in the might of the Most High.

Had not the multitude been fed, *our Lord would have missed a grand occasion for the display of His grace*. Grace is sovereign, but it is abounding, wherever it finds meet occasion it displays its power. A hungering, fainting crowd! What space for compassion! What vantage ground for benevolence! It could not be that the Lord of love should let such an opportunity slip by, His love was too eager to display itself to lie quiet at such an hour.

But, brethren, what an occasion for revealing the splendor of divine grace does the present age present! London is a brave canvas on which to paint a master picture of mercy, of power, of wisdom. What a block of marble the great world presents for the Infinite sculptor! What a monument of grace will the human race become when it shall rejoice in God the Savior! I am persuaded that the Lord has permitted the present sorrow that He may produce from it a greater glory. I am sure in my own soul that He suffers the multitudes to hunger in this terrible wilderness simply and only that He may feed them, and thus prove to the entire universe His power to bless.

I hope I have brought before your minds very clearly that amazing project, which seemed most daring, and even preposterous, and yet was needful, and even inevitable.

II. Brethren, hoping for the help of God's good Spirit, I would take you, secondly, to another sight, **THE BAFFLED DISCIPLES AND THEIR SERENE MASTER.**

The Master has consulted Philip about supplies, in order that the difficulty of the case and the insufficiency of mere means might be seen of all. Philip found that all that was available was a lad's breakfast of five barley cakes and a few small fishes, and he anxiously added, "What are they among so many?" The prudent counselor had done his best, but it did not come to much. He left this problem unsolved, "What are they among so many?"

As for the rest of the disciples, they looked in Jesus' face with astonishment and blank despair, and said, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?" But all the time that they were thus full of fidgeting and worries, there stood the Master, calm as a sweet summer's evening, not in the least disturbed or troubled. What a difference between the feebleness and unbelief of the disciples and the mighty confidence of the Lord Jesus! How much need that we be changed from glory to glory as by the image of the Lord, for we also are very far as yet from being like Him in our tone and spirit! We have not yet entered fully into His rest, nor shall we till we learn His faith in God.

Why was Jesus Christ, our Master, so calm? I have upon my mind the savor of a word the Lord once gave me for you upon that text, "Jesus knew what he would do." [See No. 1605, Volume 27—Jesus Knew What He Would Do.] It is in great part our ignorance which puts us into such a quandary. We do not know what is going to be done. We are in suspense, and suspense eats into the soul as an acid eats into metal. "From whence? How? When? Where?"—all these questions prick us like so many daggers, and each prick kills a joy. "Our thoughts are all a case of knives," as George Herbert puts it, and every knife in that case destroys a hope.

But the Master had no suspense. He knew what He would do. We shall get peace, brethren, when we also know what we shall do. "Oh," say you, "I thought you were going to say when we know what HE will do." Oh, no! We probably shall not know that till He does it. It is enough for us to know what *we* shall do. "But," says one, "that is what we do *not* know." I answer—that is what we ought to know. We ought to know that we mean to leave everything with our Lord. If we once settled it in our minds that we would trust and not be afraid, what peace we would enjoy! If we will leave God's work with God, and simply trust, we shall drink into the peace of God.

Besides that, our Lord was thus calm because *He had faith, while they had nothing better than mere sense*. Here they were, as I have said before, counting the loaves and numbering the fishes. Hear them saying, "Here are only five loaves, and they are of barley, and the fish are not only few, but small." They took care to record that fact, and to lay stress upon it, and they are equally clear as to the greatness of the hungry multitude, and the barrenness of the wilderness around them. They are all going on in that style,

judging by the sight of the eyes and the touch of the hands, but the Son of God has another and better sense, He trusts His Father.

Jesus, a man like themselves, has confidence that in the hour of His need the Godhead will not fail Him, but will fulfill His needs. We have no Godhead in unity with our humanity, but yet we have more than Jesus had. “Oh,” you say, “that cannot be!” You will agree with my statement when I remind you that we have all that Christ had, and then we have Christ Himself in addition. He has given us all that He has, so we have that, and then He has given us Himself, so we possess the double. We ought never to doubt, but to rely upon the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—in every time of our necessity. “In the mount it shall be seen,” JEHOVAH-JIREH, the Lord will provide. Oh, for grace to cast all care away—to be baffled and worried no longer, but to rest and be still!

Moreover, one thing, I think, which made Christ so calm, was that *He really acted while they only questioned*. He said, “How many loaves have you? Bring them hither to me.” He came at once to practical action. The people who do not believe in conversions are those who never convert anybody, but as soon as ever a man is led of the Spirit to turn men from darkness to light, and God blesses him in his work, he believes in it. He that has something to do has less temptation to doubt than the man who has nothing else to do but to doubt.

Heresies in the Christian church come never from the city missionary, never from the faithful pastor, never from the intense evangelist, but always from gentlemen at ease, who take no actual part in our holy war. Those literary fops who criticize religion in reviews, and have nothing else to do except to put their hands to their heads, and press whimsies out of their brows, these are the men that trouble us. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave way to no sort of doubt, for He speedily took the bread and the fish in His hands, and began blessing and breaking them, while prompt upon His own action followed the divine energy which multiplied the little store. If you and I would but serve the Lord in earnest, we might end our calculations as to how much is to be done, and how it is to be done, and where it is to be done, and all that. Get to your work, my brother, and your doubts shall fly like chaff before the wind.

The baffled disciples, and the calm and quiet Master, make up an instructive picture. We shall have profited by it to the full if we also become calmly reliant upon God, and are no more carried away with unbelieving amazement.

III. Thirdly, and briefly, I want to set two more matters before your mind’s eye for your comfort. In the miracles where we see the multitudes fed we see MEANS USED, BUT CHRIST CONSPICUOUS.

You perceive that our Lord says of the loaves, “Bring them to me.” *The means were used*. When He has multiplied these very loaves and fishes, He gives them to the men that are round about Him, and of these the multitudes partake. Whatever men in their folly may talk as to neglecting the outward means, and sitting still and doing nothing, because God will do His own work, we hear nothing of the kind from Jesus. He used the loaves, and He used the fishes, and He used the men, though He could well enough have done without them. He was omnipotent, and did not want them, but He was wise, and He would teach us the lesson that by instrumentality God’s great work is to be done. Therefore, despise not means, and at the same time do not rest in them.

But observe how the fish, and the loaves, and the men, and all the *means were made to sink*. In that picture you see the great crowd, I do not think the painter needs to lay his colors on very vividly. He can draw the people as a kind of luminous haze if he likes. The one figure that stands out like the sun at noonday, hiding all else by the brilliance of His light, is the Master Himself. Jesus only is glorious in that out-of-doors banqueting room. Where are those few fishes? “Here,” says one. “Here,” cries another. “Here,” shouts another. But those few and little fishes cannot be in the hands of all those five thousand.

Where has the bread gone to? “I have a loaf,” cries one, “I have a loaf,” says another, and they are all feeding as voraciously as they can. What has become of the original five loaves? Bring them here, brother, at least go and make a diligent search for the original five loaves, and those little fishes, that we may preserve one of them as a relic. What, can you not find one of them? You do not know where they are. They are all gone.

Of course they are. Whenever God blesses a man very greatly, that man sinks to nothing in his own esteem. If Peter's boat is full Peter's boat sinks. If we are plunged in blessing up to the hilt self is hidden under the weight of mercy. A little blessing, fancied and imagined to be something extraordinary, elevates the little man, but a great all-swamping blessing comes like a torrent, and bears the man and his littleness away, and nothing is seen but the Lord and the blessing. I am sure that it is so when the Lord uses any one of us as the means of doing good to others, we are humbled and He is exalted.

And after the miracle is over, when they go round to gather up the fragments in their twelve baskets or seven baskets, Peter has a quick eye, but ask him whether he can find one of those original loaves. He may go from basket to basket, and he cannot find one. It is lost in the creation which God has made out of it. And can he find in all those baskets the original fishes? They must be there, for it is out of those fish that all the meat came to feed the people, but you cannot discover them.

So it shall be if God will bless us, my brethren. People will gather about us, and say, "What is there in this man? We perceive no superlative talent. What is there in this woman to make her so useful? We see nothing special about her." Never you mind. Let them pick at any bit of fish which they think they can see in your native talent or vigorous character, but as for yourself, you know that if any of the multitude are fed, the provision came from the Master's hand, when he took your little, and blessed and broke and multiplied it so as to make it sufficient for the occasion.

I believe that *means are honored by Christ's using them*, but I am quite sure that ere He has done with them the means will sink into the uttermost obscurity, and Jesus Christ will be all in all, and that not because the means are unblest, but because they are blessed in so gracious a degree.

IV. Furthermore, we see in the miracles of feeding WORK ACCOMPLISHED OF A MARVELOUS KIND, BUT POWER UNEXHAUSTED.

See those five thousand men, and the women and the children! *They are all fed.* It is a proverb that there never was a feast yet from which someone did not go away unsatisfied, but there is no rule without an exception. Here are two exceptions to that proverb. "They did all eat, and were filled," upon two occasions. It did not matter how many thousands there were, not one of them was overlooked by the ever-blessed Host. It did not matter how hungry they were, they all ate till they were full.

But this is the point I want to show you, *the power that multiplied the bread and fish, and fed the thousands, had not come to an end.* Their power to eat was exhausted, but not Christ's power to feed, for when they had received to their utmost capacity, there was yet more to follow. The people were sharp set that day, the mountain air made their appetites keen, and their long fasting put a razor-edge upon them, yet when they had all eaten to the full, great baskets were brought, and these were filled, in the one case twelve, and in the other seven of them. There is enough for each, enough for all, and still enough remaining for future needs. The infinite Worker reveals His infinity by His unstinted bounty, His unmeasured liberality.

I cannot understand from the Greek what size these baskets may have been, the second set, the seven, have a name which shows that they were tolerably large, for Paul was let down in such a basket from the window when he escaped from his enemies in Damascus. The first sort, which were used when there were twelve of them appear to me to have been larger still. They give you an idea of a coffin, or a coffer. They were large baskets of which it is said that men could sleep in them. Yet these baskets, whatever their size may have been, were filled—twelve and seven, and if the Lord had willed so to do, He could have filled twelve thousand baskets, or seventy thousand baskets. His power was running over, it could not be contained in earthly vessels, any more than a river can be held in a flagon. It was still flowing in a copious stream when every mouth and every basket had been filled.

Some seem to fancy that the Lord does everything by the inch and the ounce, keeping to stint and quantity, but this is rather the manner of men than the fashion of the Lord. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed His elect from among men, hence, some will have it that the merit of His atonement must be limited. No such thing. "He gave himself for us," and there can be no measure to the value of such a gift. "He died for our sins," and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. His

objective was definite, but He achieved it by an agency which cannot be limited. He not only did that, which He mainly aimed at, but He did more, just as in this case He not only fed the thousands, but filled baskets with the fragments. The power of God and the merit of the sacrifice of Christ are among the infinite things. Let us bow before the Lord, and rejoice in that which surpasses measure.

Moreover, brothers and sisters, whatever the Lord has given to you, He has still far more to bestow upon you. Whatever you may feast upon in this public service, there is yet a portion for you to take home with you in the basket, and lay up in the store. However God may have blessed you in your work for Him in the past, He is yet able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or even think. However much the church may have been increased by a true revival, God has never yet done according to the fullness of His ability in the church as yet, even Pentecost was but the firstfruits.

I hear a voice from heaven, saying, “You shall see greater things than these.” “And greater things than these shall you do, because I go unto the Father.” We have been far from reaching the *Ultima Thule* of sacred possibility. Still “the arrow is beyond you.” We have never seen the best of our God as yet. We may go forward with the supreme faith that Pentecost has yet to be outdone—that all the mighty preaching of the fathers, when they turned nations to Christ, shall yet be exceeded in the triumphs of the cross in the latter days.

We are approaching nobler ages, and God’s great acts will not dwindle into trifles. Remember, that all that you could see, and all that you could know, would be but a minute portion of His glorious power. All that you could apprehend would only be a manifestation of the skirts of His garment. What omnipotence is, and especially what it is in the kingdom of grace, none know saving God Himself. Let us not limit the Holy One, nor bound the Infinite. In our Father’s house there is bread enough and to spare, even after millions have been satisfied from His supplies.

V. I am going to finish by observing that THE DETAILS OF THESE MIRACLES WERE DIFFERENT, BUT THEY WERE EQUALLY INSTRUCTIVE.

Kindly listen to what I am now saying, not as to anything of remarkable weight, but still as to a matter of interest in which there may be more instruction than at first sight appears.

Concerning our Lord’s great free dinners, remark, first, that *the remainder after the feast was greater than the stock when these banquets began*. They began with five loaves and two fishes, they began on another occasion with seven loaves and a few fishes, but they left off with twelve baskets full in the one case, and with seven baskets full in the other. Never was this done at any of your tables, I am sure, when your children have gathered for their meals. They did all eat and were filled, and yet there was more left than when they began. This seems impossible, and yet it is the rule in the kingdom of grace.

I have often found when I have come with a very small stock to feed you, brethren, that, I have gone away with more than I came with. You have been refreshed, and I have been more full than when I handed out your portions to you. You have gone to the class, dear friend, and felt that you were scantily supplied for feeding your dear ones, but you have given them your all, and under the divine blessing there has been enough for the class, and a double portion for you. You went out with five loaves, and you came back with twelve baskets heaped up. Strange! We may so give for God as to get in the giving—so spend as to increase in the spending—so die for God as to live more than ever.

If this be fact, what a wide field it opens to our hope, and how it banishes our fear! It shuts the door of the counting-house where we calculate according to human reason, and it opens the doors of the treasury whence we may draw ever-growing supplies. Go, brother, and scatter your handful of seed, for you shall come again rejoicing, bringing sheaves with you! Give of your meal and oil to the Lord’s servant, and your barrel and cruse shall be replenished in the giving. Remember Bunyan’s rhyme is true spiritually as well as providentially.

*“There was a man and some did count him mad,
The more he gave away the more he had.”*

Next, learn that *care is always taken by Christ of all the broken pieces*. The Lord All-sufficient is yet the God of economy. Since Jesus could create as much food as ever He pleased, you might have thought that it was hardly worth His while to gather up the fragments, and yet He did so. Waste is of Satan, not of God. God is not lavish of creation, nor prodigal of miracles. Though the Lord can raise up in this place, if He pleases, fifty ministers in an instant, He may not do so, but what He would have us do is to make use of such powers as we have.

If we are only fragments our place is not the ground, but the basket. We must not allow ourselves to be thrown away, or to be consumed by an animal passion, or to be left to decay, but we must be in the Lord's store, ready to be used when the time comes. We shall be of some use one of these days, if we are willing to be used. If you, my friend, are not a whole loaf, you are a crust, and no crust may be wasted. If you are not a slice of bread you are a crumb, and even crumbs are dear to hungry men. If you are not a big fish, yet you may be a little fish, and you must not waste yourself, nor must the church of God allow you to be wasted, but use must be found for you somewhere.

But what a wonderful thing this is—Omnipotence picking up crumbs! God All-sufficient, to whom the cattle on a thousand hills are as nothing—who could make a whole sea of fishes, or ten thousand worlds of bread, by His bare will, and nothing else, and yet He sets His disciples to gather up broken pieces that nothing may be lost! Surely it ill becomes us to waste a penny, an hour, or an opportunity. Let us be severely economical for the Lord our God.

Notice a rather curious thing, *there was most left when there was least to begin with*. When they commenced the dinner with seven loaves they gathered up seven baskets full, but when they had only five loaves they filled twelve baskets with the fragments. I suppose the baskets to have been of the same size, for I do not discover that the second set of baskets were any larger than the first. However, from a stock of seven loaves, after all expenditure, there came seven baskets as a remainder, but when there were only five loaves and a greater expenditure, there were twelve baskets full left for the waiters.

This is singular. The more they begin with, the less they end with, and the less they begin with, the more they have when the feast is concluded. Yet I have often noticed that this does occur. Have not you? When you and I have begun rather grandly, and God has blessed us, we have had great reason to thank Him, but when we have begun very feebly, He has frequently blessed us far more, and we have ended by praising Him upon the high-sounding cymbals. We have gone away wondering—"Five loaves and twelve baskets! Why, the other day, when I had seven loaves, I had only seven baskets!" Yes, let the rich rejoice when he is brought low, for he, like Job, shall be richer than before. Do not begin to sink in spirit because you seem to have declined in ability, but just be confident in God that in your case also there will be most reward at the end when there was least capital to work with.

Note again that *there was less visible means when there was more done*. There were only five loaves, but they fed five thousand—when there were seven loaves they fed only four thousand. The most was done when there was the least to do it with. And so it shall happen to you, O worker for Jesus, for the more God blesses you, the less you shall see of any adequate reason in yourself why you should be blessed. With your five loaves you shall feed your five thousand, while somebody who had seven shall do less than you.

Another curious thing is that *when there was most eaten there was most left*. When five thousand besides women and children ate as much as they could, they left more than the four thousand did. The smaller number could not eat as much as the greater, yet their leftover food uneaten was less than when five thousand filled themselves to the full. It is a curious inversion of all our regulations. We suppose the larger our company, the less will remain, but here it seems that when the company was larger then that which was left was largest, and when the company was fewer then less was left. It is so with us, the more we have to draw from us spiritually the more will remain for our own portion. We shall make no saving by reducing the number of those whom we serve, but the reverse.

Learn also one other thing and that is that *where there is the most work for Jesus there will be the most remuneration*. It is not so elsewhere, for men are often paid best for doing least, but in our Lord's

case every man's reward shall be according to his service. Those who waited on the vast crowd of people could not get much to eat themselves during the meal, for they were fully occupied in handing the bread to others, but when all was over the Master said to them, "So you have had a great company today, there were five thousand at the least. You must need refreshment yourselves, yonder are twelve baskets full of that which remains over, divide them among yourselves."

Another day their work was hard, but not quite so laborious. That extra thousand that always brings in the excessive labor through overcrowding had not been there, and they had supplied four thousand pretty pleasantly. Then it was that they received only seven baskets for their share, a liberal allowance, but still not as large as on the former occasion.

If you will work for Christ, and give for Christ and labor for Christ, you shall have a rich return of present joy from Him, and this shall have a proportion in it. Many people will always be poor because they never give to the cause of God. Poor people should give in order that they may not be poor any longer, and the rich should give that they may not become poor. I mean not that these are to be the chief motives, but they may have their place.

You that have little ability should work hard with that little ability that you may increase it, and you that have great ability of course should do so, because you have so many talents entrusted to you. The Lord will allow no service to remain unrecompensed, and work done for the poor and needy shall win its wage, not of debt, but of grace.

Satan said, "Does Job serve God for nought?" Suppose he had done so, the devil would have gone his way, and said that God was a hard master, whose service brought no sort of reward with it. Either way, Satan would have made mischief, and as we have no wish to please him, we admit that we do not serve God for nought, but that in keeping His commandments there is great reward. When the multitude has done feasting, your Master will let you sit down to meat, and you shall have abundant joy with Him.

The chief point for all of us is to get at the blessed work. In the name of the ever-living God, let us feed each one his man that is nearest to him till the whole company shall be fed, for the Christ is behind us, the Son of God is working with us, and the bread is not our bread but His bread, and the feeding of the multitude is not our work, but His, and the power is not ours, but all His own, and to His name shall be all the glory. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MARK 6:34-44, 8:1-21

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—46, 685, 35

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON:

DEAR FRIENDS—Revising this sermon reminds me of our happy Thursday evening gatherings. May I soon have the joy of ministering among you again, and marking your numerous attendances at the week night services! May these ever be to us the happy evidences of the spiritual life of the church!

I have now been here for a week, and the sunshine and warmth are doing wonders for me. We are smitten down on a sudden, but we recover our lost strength slowly, and therefore I am still weak, but the pain is gone, and I can walk a little, for which I am joyfully grateful.

My heart is with the work at home. I am glad to hear that the Elders propose special services. Give them your utmost aid. Will any one member of the church hold back? Surely each one will be eager to make up for my lack of service by his own personal endeavor. I pray my Lord and God to send prosperity to this effort. By the love of Jesus, I plead with Him to stir you all up, and through you to save sinners.

With all my heart, your loving minister,

C. H. Spurgeon,

Mentone, February 7, 1885

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.